

✓Salvo (12) Italy 2013

5 November 2018

DIRECTORS: **Fabio Grassadonia, Antonio Piazza** Running time: 110 minutes (Italian with English subtitles)

LEADING PLAYERS: **Saleh Bakri** (Salvo), **Sara Serraiocco** (Rita), **Mario Pupella** (boss), **Giuditta Perriera** (Mimma Puleo), **Luigi Lo Cascio** (Enzo Puleo).

SCRIPT: **Fabio Grassadonia** and **Antonio Piazza**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **Daniele Cipri**. EDITING: **Desideria Rayner**. MUSIC: **Emma Marrone**.

Spoiler alert: this review reveals considerable information concerning the action of the film.

Salvo is a Mafia operative whose unit is ambushed while on a job by another gang. Salvo tracks down and eliminates the man behind the operation, but spares his blind sister, instead taking her into protective custody, so to speak. His superiors, having got wind of his lack of thoroughness, demand that she be handed over, but an attachment has established itself between the girl, who has miraculously regained her sight, and her captor. The stage is set for an endgame in which at least one of the triangle must perish.

Grassadonia and Piazza's feature debut (they normally write) is an expansion of an idea in an earlier short they made, called *Rita*, also about a blind girl and an intruder who brings a kind of escape, or salvation (cue the protagonist's name in the present film). Its supranatural developments, which are treated head-on and matter of factly, place it outside the generic pool of the standard Mafia thriller, Italian or otherwise. (At the same time, it is clearly a very different animal to our other 'blind girl cured' scenario of the season, *City Lights!*)

The cinema it recalls is that of the sixties: the taciturn lone assassin makes us think of Alain Delon in Melville's *Le samourai*, especially when we see Salvo sitting on his bed in the opening sequence, waiting. The film language, on the other

hand, or presentation, is more akin to that of Antonioni or Resnais: dialogue that illuminates characters' actions and a strong narrative thread take decidedly second place to mood and observation. The audience must do the work, and draw its own conclusions about the meaning of what it sees. This is apt enough in a film in which Salvo's silent watching of Rita – and her gradual vision of him, in a New Testament-redolent choice of shots – are central to the drama, that is to his decision to 'stop and say: basta'. Does all this make him a Christ-like figure, like Terence Stamp in Pasolini's *Theorem*? Well, you can see the danger of offering unequivocal answers to questions like that.

In the end, *Salvo* may just be another Italian film, like *I Am Love*, to provide lashings of style and very little substance, and it is certainly a descendant of Slow Cinema in its harking back to a filmic language one might term 'modernist'. (Peter Strickland is another notable exponent to delve into Italian cinema's past in *Berberian Sound Studio*.) It premiered at Cannes in 2013, in a sidebar of the main competition, where it won the Grand Prix Nespresso, whatever that is! Caffè lungo might be a more accurate sobriquet, at least as far as pacing is concerned, but surrender yourself to its undeniable technique and command of cinematic time and you may be surprised how much you like it!

David Clare